



**DECISION NOTICE for the Draft Environmental Assessment:
Isaac Homestead Wildlife Management Area Agricultural Lease**
Region 7 Headquarters
PO Box 1630, Miles City, MT 59301
(406) 234-0900

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION:

The 1,169 acre Isaac Homestead Wildlife Management Area (WMA) was purchased by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) in attempt to maintain a riparian/cropland habitat complex to benefit a diversity of wildlife while enhancing public hunting opportunities. The proposed action is to continue a share-crop arrangement on 125 acres. The fields in the proposed project area have traditionally been utilized for agricultural production. The lessee will cultivate and retain a portion (75%) of the grain crop harvest, leaving the remaining crop (25%) standing for wildlife use during winter months.

The benefit and purpose of the lease is to provide winter habitat and forage, primarily for pheasants, deer, and turkeys. Standing crops also benefit migrating waterfowl and a variety of other wildlife species. The WMA is open to public hunting during all commission-approved seasons, and provides opportunity for deer, upland game bird, and waterfowl hunting.

The WMA has been under an agricultural lease with the same lessee since 1985. Currently the previous lessee is not interested in renewing the share-crop agreement. As a result, an equitable public process will be conducted to solicit a potential new lessee. The new lessee will be required to utilize farming practices that increase the productivity of the land. These include fertilizing and conditioning the soil, treating of noxious weeds, and maintaining fields in good condition.

ALTERNATIVE TO PROPOSED ACTION:

Alternative A: No Action: Agricultural lease will not be renewed and agricultural lands will not be cultivated. This alternative would require MFWP to commit resources to manage weeds on 125 acres of previously cultivated fields. Wildlife would be negatively impacted by lack of wintering habitat and food resources.

Alternative B: Proposed Action: Continue agricultural production: Agricultural lease will be established on 125 acres of farm fields. Wildlife will benefit because high-quality wintering habitat and forage will be available. The lessee(s), MFWP and sportsmen will mutually benefit through the sharecrop agreement.

PUBLIC REVIEW PROCESS:

FWP is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess potential impacts of its proposed actions to the human and physical environments, evaluate those impacts through an interdisciplinary approach, including public input, and make a decision based on this information. FWP released a draft environmental assessment (EA) for public review of this proposal (Isaac Homestead Wildlife Management Area Agricultural Lease) on February 7, 2014 and accepted public comment until 5:00 P. M. on February 28, 2014.

Legal notice of the proposal and availability of the draft EA was published in the *Miles City Star* and the *Forsyth Independent Press*. Copies of the environmental assessment were distributed to neighboring landowners and interested individuals, groups, and agencies to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project. The EA was available for public review on FWP's web site (<http://fwp.mt.gov/>, "Recent Public Notices" and "Submit Public Comments"). An FWP statewide news release was issued and posted on FWP's website (fwp.mt.gov/, "News Releases").

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comments were received.

RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comments were received.

DECISION NOTICE

Utilizing the EA and public comment, a decision must be rendered by MFWP which addresses the concerns and issues identified for this proposed action.

MFWP's analysis supports the agricultural lease of Isaac Homestead WMA as proposed. I find there to be no significant impacts on the human and physical environments associated with this project. Therefore, I conclude that the Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis, and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

After review of this proposal, it is my decision to accept the draft EA as supplemented by this Decision Notice as final, and to recommend the continuation of the agricultural lease for Isaac Homestead WMA.

The Final EA may be viewed on MFWP's Internet website: www.fwp.mt.gov or be obtained upon request from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Region 7 Headquarters, P.O. Box 1630, Miles City, MT. 59301 (406) 234-0900.



Brad R. Schmitz
R7 Regional Supervisor

March 4, 2014

Date